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Encouraging the Growth of OWLs Worldwide: Utilizing Intercultural Rhetoric to Inform Best Practices

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Encouraging the Growth of OWLs Worldwide: Utilizing Intercultural Rhetoric to Inform Best Practices



Joshua M. Paiz, MA
Coordinator, Purdue OWL

Good evening. My name is Joshua Paiz, one of the graduate-student administrators of the Purdue Online Writing Lab and a doctoral candidate at Purdue University. I was both honored and humbled to come and share with you today, what I see as the possible applications of intercultural rhetoric in the writing center. As my position relates to the Online Writing Lab, and not the physical space, I will focus on IR and OWLs.

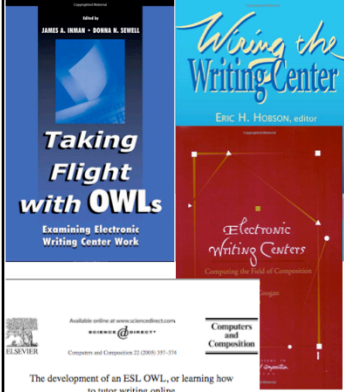
Presentation Overview

- Historical & Research Contextualization
- IR & the (Online) Writing Center
 - Content
 - Research
 - Expansion

During the course of this presentation, I will provide you a brief bit of history on the Purdue OWL, to help contextualize the rest of the presentation. I will then discuss How IR can best inform Writing Center Practice and OWL Content Creation. This will be done using the Purdue OWL as an example and by focusing on recent L2 writing resource developments and a reinterpretation of recent OWL research. I will conclude by showing how IR can help to continue to inform practice at the Purdue OWL, as well as to encourage OWL growth abroad.



The context for this presentation is going to be the Purdue Online Writing Lab, from here on the Purdue OWL. Please note, that the statistics that you see behind me are from about two years ago. Coming online in 1994, The Purdue OWL celebrates twenty years of helping writers around the globe by providing almost 800 writing resources to users from around the globe. While the Purdue OWL's original mission was to help the Purdue Writing Lab to meet students where it's at and to help address the writing lab's contributions to Purdue's mission as a Land, Sea, and Air grant University, by extending the reach of the Writing Lab's support to the local community. The Purdue OWL has gone global. Since it's inception, the Purdue OWL has contained resources for L2 writers. However, beginning in the spring of 2012, the Purdue OWL began an aggressive expansion of these resources. However, in order for this expansion to be executed in a meaningful way, a number of things would be needed: skilled developers, research, and a firm theoretical base to aid in the continued training and professional development of our content developers, all of whom are graduate students—and only a small handful of whom are second language users.



Taking Flight with OWLs
Examining Electronic Writing Center Work
James B. Inman & Barbara A. Sewell

Writing the Writing Center
Eric H. Hobson, editor

Electronic Writing Centers
Computing in the Field of Composition
Sarah Rilling

Available online at www.clibonline.com
Computers and Composition 22 (2006) 157–174

The development of an ESL OWL, or learning how to tutor writing online
Sarah Rilling
English Department, Kent State University, PO Box 5200, Kent, OH 44242-0520, USA

Abstract
This essay describes the history of writing center theory. As a...
This volume of essays are the...
language writers – and more...
writing center theory...
to the type of feedback OWL...
between online and written...
from the letter to close up a...
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Keywords: Electronic writing centers; OWL

Innovating Writing Centers and Online Writing Labs outside North America
Bao-Hsien Tan
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Bio Data:
Dr. Bao-Hsien Tan is an associate Professor at the Putra University, Malaysia. She obtained her PhD from Massey University, New Zealand. Her research interest is language learning technology. Her recent publication includes an edited collection titled *Theoretical and Practical Orientations in Language and Literature Studies*. She is the chief editor of *The English Teacher* from 2008.

Abstract
This study highlights the writing difficulty of tertiary students in ESL or EFL contexts. It describes two successful innovations, writing center and online writing lab, initiated by...

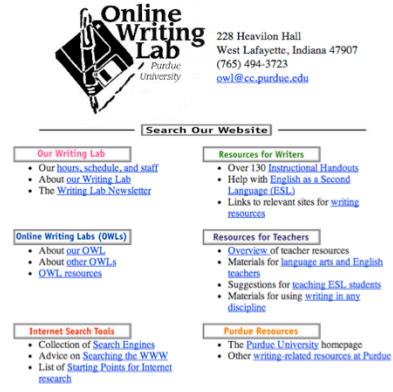
OWL-Related Research

- Taking Flight with OWLs* – The place of OWLs in Writing Center Theory & implementing OWLs (Inman & Sewell, 2000)
- OWLs and L2 Writers
 - Rilling (2005) – Synchronous online tutoring
 - Tan (2011) – OWLs in Asia: importing and mirroring the West
- OWLs and SLW – Largely under-investigated
 - Opening for IR

Since shortly after OWLs appeared on the scene, they became the object of a concerted research focus. Beginning in 2000 a number of edited volumes and monographs were published. These volumes, like Inman and Sewell's (2000) *Taking Flight with OWLs* attempted to provide a focused and comprehensive discussion on OWLs including their space in writing center theory and best practices in OWL deployment, as well as detailed conversations of the fiscal and human resources needed to launch OWLs. However, in this volume, only one entry discusses OWLs and L2 writing support—this focusing on the launch of an English-language OWL in Hong Kong. This relative lack of research on OWLs for L2 writing support in general and the creation and content development for OWLs as L2 writing support tools is problematic.

Turning specifically to the literature in TESOL and L2 Writing, only two pieces, Rilling (2005) and Tan (2011) have discussed the space and place for OWLs. While Rilling examined real-time online tutorials, Tan offered a more comprehensive overview of how and why OWLs are coming into being across Asia. Tan (2011) points out that OWLs are springing to birth for many of the same reasons as they came into being in North America and Western Europe. However, and this is where Intercultural Rhetoric can have the most profound impact on Online Writing Centers, Tan reports that the majority of OWLs throughout Asia are imported by Western faculty members working in Asian universities, and largely outsource their content by merely

Intercultural Rhetoric & Online Writing Labs



The screenshot shows the Purdue OWL website interface. At the top left is the logo for the Online Writing Lab, featuring a computer monitor and a pen. To the right of the logo is the address: 228 Heavilon Hall, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907, phone (765) 494-3723, and email owl@cc.purdue.edu. Below the logo is a search bar labeled "Search Our Website". The main content area is divided into several sections: "Our Writing Lab" (with links to hours, staff, and newsletter), "Resources for Writers" (with links to instructional handouts, ESL help, and writing resources), "Online Writing Labs (OWLs)" (with links to about OWLs, other OWLs, and OWL resources), "Resources for Teachers" (with links to teacher resources, materials for language arts and English teachers, and suggestions for teaching ESL students), "Internet Search Tools" (with links to search engines, advice on searching the WWW, and a list of starting points for internet research), and "Purdue Resources" (with links to the Purdue University homepage and other writing-related resources at Purdue). At the bottom of the screenshot, it says "The Purdue OWL c. 1998".

- Intercultural Rhetoric (IR) (Connor; 2008, 2011)
 - Interactions of national and disciplinary contexts
 - Negotiation & accommodation
- IR & the (Online) Writing Lab
 - Content
 - Research
 - Expansion

The Purdue OWL c. 1998

It is my feeling that IR has great potential when applied to the contexts of Online Writing Labs in the US and abroad. While this may appear limited at first, OWLs continue to be on the rise as Writing Centers spread across Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia; and, as writing centers specialists in these areas continue to hear the call of OWLs as tools to meet students where they are and in their time of need—for some of the students that I have known, this may be late at night right huddled over their keyboards.

While outlining the IR framework Connor (2008; 2011) pointed out that some of the assumptions that undergird the IR framework deal with the interactions of national and disciplinary contexts. However these two forces impact each other in a number complex ways, creating moments of tension and opportunity for writers. This may relate to the culturally-based rhetorical expectations related to making and supporting claims to potentially culturally-based rules of information architecture, web-based presentation, and information literacy (e.g., McBride, 2008).

IR, particular notions of contextuality, the negotiated nature of meaning, and accommodation may help to inform (online) writing center best practices in the following three areas: Content, Research, and Expansion. The remainder of this presentation will focus on these three areas, using the Purdue OWL as an example.

IR & OWLs: Content

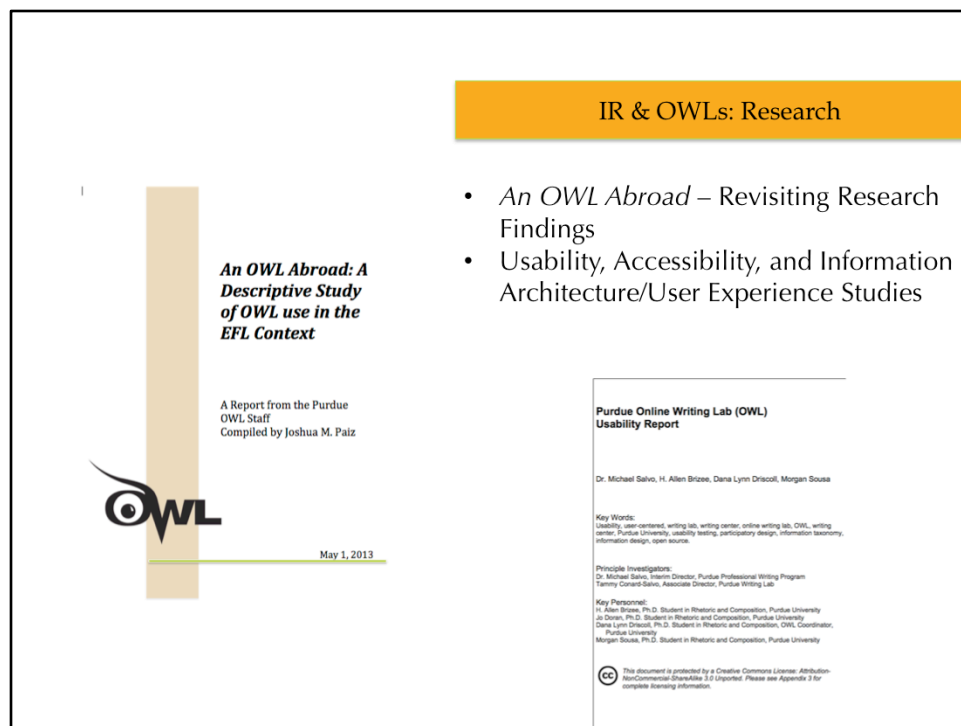


Writing for Global Business Audiences: An Introduction, from the Purdue Online Writing Lab

- Business and Professional Writing (WID/ESP)
- Writing for North American Academic Contexts (EAP)
- Plagiarism and ESL Writers (EAP)

Content represents, in my mind, the area for most promise for IR and OWLs. IR can be used to inform OWL content creation in a number of ways. The first is through direct engagement with writing for international/multinational context. For the Purdue OWL, this has led to the weaving of some of IR's findings and assumptions to our pre-existing Writing for a Global Business Audience series, which focuses on writing for the North American, Indian, and Chinese contexts. When these resources were first launched in 2009/2010, they were largely descriptive in nature, but could potentially be misread as an overarching how to, which could lead to claims of these resources being reductivist and essentializing. In 2012, we decided to examine how IR might better frame these pieces making them more useful to both writers writing in English as an additional language and for those individual who are writing in English as their first language but writing for new context. This introduction included explicit call outs not only to IR, but specifically to the contextually sensitive nature of writing and how not only is it national culture and the linguistic and rhetorical expectations of the natal language that may impact writing for these diverse national contexts, but also that small cultures, that is the corporate and/or institutional cultures in which one finds themselves embedded can impact writing and its final form.

Thinking again to root cause of difference, keeping in mind that difference shouldn't be viewed as some dirty word, we have used IR in various forms to also inform how we frame all of our L2 writing resources. This led to a considerable expansion and



IR can also stand to inform research related to OWL by being both a framework to guide the actual instrument design to helping to group and interpret findings.

From March 2012 to March 2013, the Purdue OWL engaged in a year-long web-based research project to gauge uses, needs, and attitudes of our OWL users who either are currently teaching, or have taught writing in the traditionally-defined EFL context, please understand that I do not use the term EFL unproblematically. While IR did not play much of a role in the original project, it can be used to revisit and to reanalyze our findings. This is an ongoing process and one which we have just started. We are beginning by examining the response from our email interviews, responses in which many users provided suggestions for improving L2 writing resources, and asking ourselves “how do/can we implement this in a way that is in keeping with the IR assumptions of negotiated-ness and accommodation?” Again, this is a process that we have just recently begun.

Another place where IR and OWLs might intersect is through usability research. Any educational resource should, at some point, engage in usability, accessibility, and information architecture/user experience studies. And the findings of these studies should be reported and their value highlighted to the Applied Linguistics, CALL, and ELT communities. It is through these kinds of studies that we can evaluate the efficacy of our resources and improve them to lower barriers-to-use for our users

IR & OWLs: Expansion

- OWLs outside the US
- Tutor Training



By way of closing, I would like to talk about the potential of IR to inform OWL expansion. While there are a number of potential avenues, there are two that are, to me, immediately salient.

The first is as a tool to encourage and to advocate for OWL growth and development outside of the US. At many of the conferences that I've been to over the past two years, when my colleagues discover my connection to the Purdue OWL there is usually some discussion of what it would take to create an OWL at their institution, translating the Purdue OWL into the local language, or best practices for running pre-existing OWLs. I believe that IR can be especially useful for advocating for OWL creation in the traditionally defined EFL context. Specifically, I feel that IR's approach to the L1, the L2, their interactions, and local/disciplinary expectations could be a useful starting point by highlighting a unique way to meet local needs at that university/institution. While the Purdue OWL is perhaps one of the oldest and most well-known continuously operational OWLs, it cannot be all things. IR can also, as discussed previously, be used to inform and guide content creation at local OWLs, helping to address the problem pointed out by Tan (2011) that many Asian OWLs merely mirror and link to pre-existing content, typically on US-based OWLs.

The second, and this is true for all OWLs, even the Purdue OWL, as well as for physical writing labs. IR can be used to ground tutor training. Connor (2011) calls for



Thank you for your
attention

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It has been my hope to highlight some of the ways that IR can be used in online writing labs. I see this as a presentation of possibility and would welcome any continued discussion/co-cognition on this topic at any point during the conference. Thank you for your time and attention.